

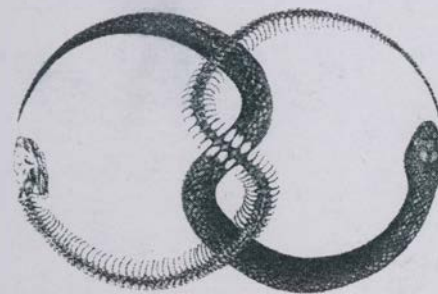
In this provocative essay Massimo Passamani presents a succinct and revealing description of Max Stirner's libertarian, egoist social intercourse through his "union of egoists" in terms of "Mutual Utilization". Within its pages Passamani contrasts the immediate and direct interests and relationships advocated by Stirner to reified interests and relationships mediated by alien ideals, compulsory morals and childish fantasies. We've also thrown in two short pieces further exploring the subject of egoist mutuality by our close friend and co-conspirator Wolfi.

Enemy Combatant Publications



Wishek, North Dakota

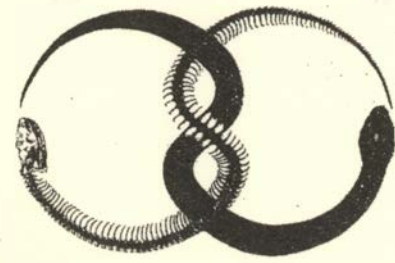
Mutual Utilization



by Massimo Passamani



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of atomized ciphers suddenly deciding to throw themselves against the walls of society. Rather it is individuals, discovering themselves as such, coming together to create their lives against a common enemy, finding ways to intertwine their ongoing struggles and their projects of enjoyment. Thus, the ways we relate are an essential aspect of this immanent revolution. Those of us with a conscious desire for a different world need to be willing to make an effort to relate differently now. This means developing *practical* relationships of theoretical-practical kinship. Such kinship is too often looked upon as something abstract: we have similar ideas, therefore we are kindred spirits. But if you and I cannot transform these shared ideas into concrete projects, into a real intertwining of lives and struggles in a focused manner, then our supposed kinship is just another meaningless spook haunting our heads. Thus, we need to recognize our strength in each other, and put effort into each other for *mutual strengthening*, rather than offering charity to each other and nurturing weakness. This is where Stirner's association of egoists connects to the idea of mutuality. Mutuality based in a respect for the uniqueness of each one of us, the difference between us, is essential to a revolution that can overcome the domination of survival over life and make enjoyment of life central to shared practice and pursuit.

But what is mutuality? It can be described as a sharing that does not weigh or measure, in which everyone involved recognizes each other as a source of strength, enjoyment, and the only kind of wealth that matters – the fullness of life. Brought down to the practical level, those of us who want to make the free creation and enjoyment of our lives our main project need to ask ourselves: Are our relationships our own creation, or the product of unconscious habits instilled by this society? Are they really mutually strengthening and expanding each of us? Are we creating and enhancing the wealth of life and joy in each other? Are we multiplying our ferocity against this authoritarian, money-based civilization by intertwining our lives and struggles? If not, we should question why we have any sort of relationship. Because the point is not that we owe something to each other. We don't. The idea of debt is part of the economic framework of this society. The point is that the best way to fully enjoy and grasp our lives and to fight against this society is to make every moment, every activity and every relationship significant in the creation of a unitary life to the extent that we are able. And until we destroy the society that imposes its reality on us at every moment, this will be a constant struggle and challenge, requiring a high level of awareness and mutual effort and aid.

an anarchist, but everyone, at least for the time, had an irrepressible lust for life that couldn't help but express itself in rebellious ways in this society. Our life together involved endless adventures: theft, travels, small attacks against various manifestations of the world we hated, public playful disruptions of daily life. We had time for all of this, because without thought we simply shared the necessities of life. Our friendship and shared adventures created a spontaneous mutuality.

A typical adventure happened one May Day. We wandered around downtown Portland through the business district playing improvised noise on various instruments, handing out leaflets inviting people to come join us for an afternoon picnic rather than going back to work. We had stolen a fairly good supply of food and beer – quite a bit more than we ourselves needed. We had a delightful time and received many positive responses (from smiles to “thumbs-up” gestures to encouraging comments), but I don't recall anyone else having the courage to take the afternoon off and join our picnic. Still we had a delightful time, and this event is reflective of the sort of life we chose to live together.

Activities of this sort, a short-lived anarchist coffeehouse in our house and our constant posting of poetic messages of revolt on telephone poles and other places helped us develop a network of connections that kept a fairly decent flow of all the material pleasures of life available. This network, which extended far outside specifically anarchist milieus, provided much of the material basis for how we chose to live. If in North Beach, “what mattered most was poetry, freedom, creativity and having a good time”, for us it was rebellion, *living* poetically, creativity and having a good time. Some of us had an explicitly revolutionary perspective that was lacking in the North Beach scene Rosemont describes. If we also had illusions, I can still say that at that time, I experienced a kind of semi-conscious utopian practice acting against this world which made life a delight and created some of my closest friendships. That practice involved a completely spontaneous form of mutual aid.

I have continued to pursue such a practice to the extent that I can since that time. If that particular situation dissolved, my own experiments and explorations have continued in a more diffuse way, and several of my friends and accomplices from that time continue to be involved on many occasions. These are the others who consciously embraced anarchist perspectives.

The conception of revolution that I share with some of these friends differs from typical (mostly marxist) conceptions. Vaneigem's idea of a “revolution of everyday life” has influenced this conception. Revolution in this sense is not a future apocalyptic event brought about by abstract historical forces. It is a way of confronting life here and now. Such a revolution is not a bunch

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Mutual Aid and the Enjoyment of Life

By Wolfi

“Life in North Beach was the closest thing to marvelous anarchy it has ever been my pleasure to enjoy. Despite battles with landlords, harassment by tourists, and mounting police terror, the Beats and their allies – old time hoboes, jazz musicians, oyster pirates, prostitutes, drug addicts, winos, homosexuals, bums and other outcasts – maintained a vital community based on mutual aid, and in which being different was an asset rather than a liability. In this community made up of people of many different races and nationalities, the practice of equality and solidarity was second nature. Almost everyone was poor, but no one went hungry, and newcomers had no trouble finding places to stay. In North Beach, 1960, what mattered most was poetry, freedom, creativity and having a good time.”

—Franklin Rosemont, *Dancing in the Streets*

I do not believe that there is any inherent purpose to the universe or to life. Rather I see them as accidents, potentially delightful accidents. With that in mind, the only reason I see for living is to enjoy life to the fullest extent possible. Yet I think we would all agree that there is much in this world that gets in the way of enjoying life. Among other things, there is a social reality that prohibits many enjoyments and tries to put price tags on the rest. An individual can only live a life of full enjoyment in opposition to such a world. This is why I am an anarchist and have been one for more than thirty years.

In pursuing the enjoyment of life against this world of proscriptions and imposed price tags, I have lived on the margins of society, as an outsider. It has often not been easy. But at various times I have found others with whom to share my ongoing battle to create my life on my own terms. Friends, comrades, accomplices pursuing our dreams together, finding ways to make them interweave. What we created, how consciously we created and how far it went in creating our dreams and desires has varied, but if others surrendered their dreams over time, I have never given up my pursuit of a life of enjoyment and rebellion. One of the most outstanding periods of my life happened in Portland in the early 1990s. In many ways, what I experienced with specific friends and the networks we developed is reminiscent of Rosemont’s description of North Beach in 1960.

I moved to Portland at the end of 1991. There I met several people who were to be my closest companions and accomplices for the next few years. A few of them continue to be among my best friends to this day. While each of us had various ways of bringing in the money that we needed to get by, this aspect of our lives was always kept subordinate to our enjoyment, our revolt and our projects. Not everyone among our little group of friends was

when I had no desire for it. Now I have no problem with letting friends with a better money flow than me buy me a few beers or take me out to eat when they offer. Nor do I have any problem with asking for couches to surf or guest rooms to use when I am traveling or without a living space of my own. But when people try to force unwanted help on me because I'm sometimes short on money, or start spreading the word among friends that they're worried I'm depressed when in fact I'm merely aggravated, because *I want to be left alone*, that pisses me off. That is not *mutual aid*, because *I don't want it*. For aid to be mutual, when you give it, I also have to want it. There is nothing mutual in you shoving your aid down my throat.

What this all comes down to is that *reciprocity* (like collectivism or communism) is based on the ridiculous premise of *common* values by which a measurable balance can be calculated. Mutuality – at least as I use the term – starts from the idea of unique and ever-changing values among unique and ever-changing individuals who therefore choose to relate through *free* agreements and *free* associations, where freedom means that they can be ended at any time. *Mutual aid* requires the agreement of the recipient to receive aid and ends with the end of that agreement. Reciprocity, collectivism and communism are all based primarily on *equality* and *commonality*: the first on the equality of measured balance based on common values, the last two on the equality of all as members of the collective or communal order sharing its values. Mutuality, on the other hand, has its basis in free agreement between unique, and so utterly *unequal*, beings, individuals for whom balance can always and only be a wild and ever-changing dance.

Mutual Utilization: Relationship and Revolt in Max Stirner

By Massimo Passamani

In the panorama of studies of Stirner there are many silences – silences that, as often happens, communicate more than words. One such silence surrounds Stirner's reflections on the theme of interpersonal relationships, reflections that form a genuine theory of life together. As is known, his considerations on relationships are contained in that section of *The Unique and Its Property* entitled "My Intercourse." Stirner attributed great importance to the description of the relations that the Unique maintains with others, as the vast amount of space he dedicates to the topic shows (it is in fact the largest section in the book). Nonetheless, "My Intercourse" has been and is perhaps the least explored part of Stirner's work. In any case, it is the least understood; a misunderstanding that Stirner himself already emphasized in the response to the critiques that Szeliga, Feuerbach and Hess had made of *The Unique and Its Property*.

In my opinion, a deep examination of the question of relationships in Stirner means not only studying what may be the most important part of his thought, but also confronting Stirner's most significant themes from an anarchist point of view (a point of view that obviously doesn't exhaust their complexity). "My Intercourse" contains his description of property (thus the critiques of the state, of Proudhon and of the communists), the associative proposal of the union of egoists (thus the judgment of the party, society and, more generally, hierarchical order), and the distinction between rebellion and revolution (thus the difference between the demolition and the reformation of what exists).

For the same sort of reasons, it would be useful to spend some time on some of the more important and recurrent criticisms of Stirner's conception of relationships. In fact, though Stirner's thought is the object of such criticisms, much of their content could be referred more generally to any conception that radically affirms the centrality of the individual.

In Stirner, the awareness is clear that an extreme defense of individuality itself, before being a way of life, is a way of understanding. When Stirner, drawing on Protagoras' motto, maintains that "the individual is the measure of all things," he means precisely that. One cannot understand his way of thinking about relationships between Uniques, if one doesn't first understand his way of conceiving the world of the Unique. In the same way, one cannot understand the coming together of individual owners – the union of egoists – if one doesn't first understand what Stirner means by individual owner.

“Everyone is the center of his own world. World is only what he himself is not, but what belongs to him, is in a relationship with him, exists for him.

“Everything turns around you; you are the center of the outer world and of the thought world. Your world extends as far as your capacity, and what you grasp is your own simply because you grasp it. You, the Unique, are ‘the Unique’ only together with ‘your property.’”

In my opinion, this passage summarizes *The Unique and Its Property* as a whole. Stirner’s way of understanding relationships between individuals, meaning mutual utilization, is only its logical and necessary consequence. Affirming that everyone is the center of his own world means denying any sort of authority and hierarchy, insofar as they claim to impose their centrality, and imposing a perspective different and opposed to that of the individual, despoil him of his property.

Emphasizing the universality of uniqueness (in the sense that everyone is unique), Stirner does not set himself as the center, but as a center. Thus, uniqueness is closely connected to mutuality.

When Stirner speaks of a world, he means the collection of relationships that the Unique maintains with those other than himself, be they things or persons. The centrality with respect to the world is therefore centrality with respect to his relationships, and these latter being the “mutuality, action, commercium among individuals,” we see once again how centrality and mutuality presuppose each other.

If everyone is “unique” only together with his “property,” then everyone is “unique” only together with his relationships (with his world). The term uniqueness therefore excludes absoluteness, in that absolute – ab-solutum – means precisely the lack of relationships, of connections. Thus the critique made against Stirner that he transformed **the I** of Fichte into an equally absolute individual collapses. In fact, the Fichtean I, like Feuerbach’s human being, is an essence outside of the particular individual, not the flesh and blood individual, “transient and mortal.” It is a transcendent being that presupposes perfect community among human beings, whereas Stirner speaks of a Unique whose community with others is only thinkable, not real. In reality, we, as Uniques, are irreducibly different. We come to be equal only if we pose a “third,” external and transcendent – like Humanity, God or the State – that mediates relationships between us. And hierarchy consists precisely of this “third” ; I no longer value the other for what my relationship with him is, meaning what he is for me, but rather in relation to an entity that contains us and links us together.

Egoist Mutuality

By Wolfi

I am convinced that relationships among egoists will benefit greatly if they are based on *mutuality*. But what do I mean by mutuality?

Many see mutuality and reciprocity as the same thing. I make a distinction. I see reciprocity as the sort of relationship expressed in “an eye for an eye” or “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” To me this involves too much calculation, and so shows itself to be based on the assumption of *common* values. But I don’t value anything in the same way anyone else does. Nor does any other unique being. My values are my own, and I recognize your values as uniquely your own. For me, this recognition – not reciprocity – is the basis for mutuality.

To make this clearer, let’s look again at that *reciprocal* interaction: “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch your.” Say that you had one of those miserable itches on your back that you just can’t reach, and you came up to me and asked, “Would you scratch my back?” If I did so, and then you immediately started scratching my back afterwards (this is what reciprocity, as I use the term, would require, though perhaps not immediately), I might very well be pissed off, because my back doesn’t itch, and I don’t want it scratched. In my understanding of *mutuality*, the moment I responded positively to your request to have your back scratched, you and I had reached a mutual understanding. I responded that way because my desire corresponded to yours – not because it was *the same* as yours, but because it *corresponded*. There could be all sorts of reasons for this correspondence. Perhaps I simply care about you, so your distress bothers me, and easing your distress gives me pleasure. Perhaps I find you attractive, and being able to touch you in a way that gives you some pleasure gives me a thrill. Perhaps I consider that I may want a favor from you some day, and the fact that I’ve done you a favor will make you feel more favorable toward me. It doesn’t matter what my reasoning was. The mutuality occurs the moment I decide to scratch your back as you requested.

But there is another side to this. Among anarchists there is a lot of talk about “mutual aid.” But the way many anarchists talk about it, they are actually talking about *reciprocal* aid, or worse, some collectivist or communist form of aid. And there is nothing anarchist about any of these, because in all of them both the giving *and the receiving* of the aid is treated as compulsory. Perhaps because I am a “nice” guy, as generous as I can afford to be (and sometimes perhaps a bit more), I have most often experienced this compulsory “mutual aid” when certain individuals have tried to force aid I never requested on me,

At the basis of Stirner's ideas on relationships, there is the clear awareness of the irreconcilability between the conception of those who hold that only the establishment of order can guarantee liberty and those who instead affirm that from liberty alone can order be born.

It is a matter, if you will, of the eternal conflict between synthesis and balance, between authority and liberty. And there should be no more doubt about where to place Stirner in this conflict.

Publishers Note:

This text was translated and edited by Wolfi Landstreicher. All quotes from Max Stirner are also translated by Wolfi Landstreicher, who has completed and published (through LBC Books) translations of *"Stirner's Critics"* and *"The Philosophical Reactionaries"*. He is also working on a complete translation of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigenthum* under the title of *The Unique and Its Property*.

If everyone, as unique, is exclusive and exclusivist, his existence cannot incline toward community, but rather toward one-sidedness. No longer having anything that unites us, we no longer have anything that separates us or makes us enemies. In fact, "the opposition disappears in complete separateness or uniqueness." It is precisely the awareness of our one-sidedness (of having our own perspective) that allows us to rise up against hierarchy, against the order of dependence on which every state is based, and to lay the foundations for a new associative form – the union – based on radically different presuppositions. "Let's not seek the most comprehensive community, 'human society,' but let's seek in others only means and organs that we use as our property!"

In the "reduction" of the other to means, some have wanted to see a defense of exploitation, the negation of every form of non-conflictual relationship, the legitimation of a war that opens the way to "collective suicide." If one instead inserts it into Stirner's conception of the world, one realizes that it is the only form of relationship that doesn't deny the centrality of the individual and that is based on real mutuality.

The typical form of religious alienation consists in attributing value to a person or a thing in the absolute sense, meaning independently of our relationship to it. The belief in a being that has value in itself and for itself, thus, worthy of our "enthusiasm," absolutely interesting (i.e., an interesting object without and interested subject), presupposes the ideological "fixed idea" of a hierarchical order. In fact, I can consider a person absolutely deserving of love, respect, etc., only if I don't consider her for herself, but place her in relation (and thus subordinate her) to a higher being – let's say God, the state, or society – and consider them as "part" of it. Thence, it is not the particular individual in its unrepeatable uniqueness with whom I enter into relationship, but rather the christian, the citizen, the member of society.

Contrarily, seeking the value of everything and every person within and not outside myself, I affirm my centrality in relation to the world, to my world. In this way:

"If I cherish and care for you, because I love you, because my heart finds nourishment in you and my desire finds satisfaction in you, this is not for the sake of some higher being,... but out of egoistic pleasure: you yourself with your own being have value to me, because your essence is not a higher being, is not higher or more general than you, is unique as you yourself, because you are it."

The awareness of one's egoism, thus of one's use of the other, comes to be the only way of recognizing and appreciating his value, those properties of his that, even though they don't exhaust his uniqueness, communicate something – however non-essential – about him to me. And being, as I said, mutual use, each individual, each Unique, is the beginning and end of his relational activity.

Precisely because, even from a biological point of view, I cannot take as a reference anything different from myself; what is other than me, I can only think of (and for Stirner, thought in its universality cannot grasp the peculiarity of the bodily and momentary I) as subject, but in the very moment that it crosses my path, it exists for me, and all that I seem to owe to it, I owe only to myself. Saying therefore that “For me you are nothing but my food, even as I too am fed upon and consumed by you,” is not the expression of a paranoiac desire to crush (a relationship between “ruminants” as Kuno Fischer described it), but rather a calm affirmation of our centrality and our one-sidedness.

It is important to note how Stirner, when he states that “we have have a single relationship with one another, that of usability, utility, use,” he emphasizes again and again the mutuality inherent in such relationships (as opposed to the hierarchical relationship that, posing absolute values, negates it).

If I consider the other as “an object for which I may feel something or also nothing, a usable or non-usable subject,” with which to get on and reach an agreement “so as to increase my power through this alliance and be able to succeed, by uniting our forces, where one alone would fail,” I realize that it is not only a matter of a mutual utilization, but also of a utilizable mutuality.

The deliberate stress that Stirner places on the usability of the relationships that the Unique maintains with the other only aims to emphasize how in the relationship between individual owners there is a mutual interest in the person and not, as morality and religion claim, a mutual renunciation. Real love, as opposed to idealized love, is a self-interested emotion and not an act of self-denial. In fact, “we want to love because we feel love, because love is pleasant to our heart and our senses, and in love for the other person we feel a higher enjoyment of ourselves.” It is the same love for the other that leads me to “joyfully sacrifice for him innumerable pleasures of mine,” to “give up innumerable things to see his smile blossom again,” and to “put at risk for him the thing that, if he were not there, would be the dearest thing in the world to me: my life or my well-being or my freedom. Or rather my pleasure and my happiness consist precisely in the enjoyment of his happiness and pleasure.” “But,” Stirner emphasizes, “there is something that I don’t sacrifice to him: myself; I remain an egoist and enjoy him.”

The charge Stirner makes against all those improvers of humanity – like Baron von Stein – who preach the principle of love is significant: “You love human beings, so you torment the individual human being, the egoist: your love of humanity is cruelty to human beings.”

others as an individual, without having recourse to the “convenient bulwark of authority.” In fact, one is quite weak (and incomplete) if one must summon (or needs to be) an authority. Only in the negation of authority can the individual reject the alienated life of the docile, usable citizen, the ruler’s subject who leads an existence that moves to the rhythms of service.

There’s no need to emphasize how many similarities there are between Stirner’s union and anti-authoritarian associational conceptions. It’s no accident that the anarchist thinkers who have most consistently harked back to Stirner are the ones who have perhaps contributed the most to the description of acratism. The notion – for example – of “the method of equal liberty” recalls much that is close to Stirner’s thesis of the equal inequality in the relations between Uniques.

Drawing on a theme already developed by E. de La Boetie, that of voluntary servitude, Stirner affirms that “When subservience ceases to be, it will be all over for rulership as well!” and after proposing insurrection as the sole solution to the “social question,” he adds in reproach: “If the rich exist, it is the fault of the poor.” A few years later, the anarchist Bellaguardie wrote: “Have you believed that up to today there have been tyrants? Well, you are still wrong, because there are only slaves: where no one obeys, no one commands.”

Stirner notes how domination and hierarchy, along with (or perhaps before) being a structuring of inter-individual power, are forms of intra-individual alienation, the process of internalizing the “sacred.” It is in social customs, seen as forms of the “compulsion to repeat,” that he identifies the continuous reproduction of alienation.

Thus, between individual owners who refuse subordination before any social order – with its customs, its models of behavior – the only possible relationships are those based on the – contrived, precarious, and always changeable – balance between the egoisms of individuals. Associative relations cannot be based on the imposition of a fictitious equality, nor can a higher synthesis be created between the individual powers. Stirner radically negates any theory of the identification of the individual with the collectivity, of the supersession of the individual in the social. Every individual conscious of his uniqueness will always be ready to rise up against any attempt to settle, through whatever form of authoritarian “fixed idea,” the antagonism between individuals. Rebellion, then, is not just a transitional phase from society to the union, but rather an attitude of constant insurrection against every power, against every heaven, that debases one’s inalienable exclusivity. Without a continuous, extremist exercise of one’s autonomy, there could certainly be a revolution, but it would still just be a reform of the existent.

In the union of egoists, exploitation (“assertion at the expense of others”) is eliminated as soon as the co-associates, equally aware egoists, “no longer want to be such fools as to let anyone live at their expense.”

In a careful reading of Stirner’s thought, it also seems obvious that one cannot associate the interests of the Unique with liberal utilitarianism. Bentham’s arithmetic of pleasures still consists of a belief in a thing that is interesting in the absolute sense, meaning a belief in a “sacred” thing. And we know how for Stirner, any behavior toward something as interesting in itself and for itself is always religious behavior. For Stirner, self-interest is not a principle, it is “a mere name, a concept empty of content, utterly lacking any conceptual development.” In the eyes of our philosopher, “the moral system of self-interest condemns the real self-interest of particular individuals, in much the same way as the supposed universality of reason forces ‘private reason’ to submit.”

From this obviously incomplete picture I’ve drawn of relationship and association as found in Stirner one can, I think, understand how it isn’t possible to transform the union of egoists into a *bellum omnium contra omnes* that does nothing but again propose the domination of human being over human being as the sole form of life together.

The Unique of whom Stirner speaks is not moved in her relations with others by the “pleasure of being rude” that characterizes Dostoevsky’s character from the underground. What drives her is not at all the need for the impossible of that inexorable *appétit d’être* that leads Camus’ Caligula to state that “One is always free at someone else’s expense.” Also foreign to Stirner is that fear of death which, in Canetti’s account, the sultan of Delhi is striving to defeat when he decides to raze the city to the ground in order to enjoy an instant of that “solitary uniqueness” that comes from the “feeling of having survived all men.”

Stirner “doesn’t defend the power of the individual to dominate others.” since he shows in an extremely significant way that the exercise of domination is a strongly de-individualizing practice. And since “whoever has to count on the lack of will in others in order to exist, is a shoddy product of these others, as the master is a shoddy product of the slave,” domination comes to be a form of individual disempowerment. And this disempowerment is also accompanied by a process of alienation in that the force of the individual gets subordinated to the proof of the inferiority of others. The desire to dominate consists of the pleasure of prevailing over others, i.e., the effort of escaping a condition that one perceives as equality. If, instead, one is aware of one’s own exclusivity, of one’s being irreducibly different from everyone else, one can only reject the craving for “superiority” as a homogenizing principle. The power of which Stirner speaks is the capacity to place oneself before

If “every religion is a cult of society, this principle, by which the social (civilized) human being is dominated,” the awareness of egoism and the refusal of self-renunciation can only lead Stirner to elucidate a new form of associative relation, the union of egoists.

Once the state and society are negated as historical forms of mediated life together that transcend the individual and are therefore alienated, associative relationships have to have completely different characteristics.

The main element is that the individual associates for her own individual interests and not for a hierarchical and extortionist “common good.” For Stirner, society is only an additional product of individuals whose interests are unique. Thinking of society – as Proudhon himself does – as a collective subject, as an “ethical person,” means condemning the particular individual, in the name of a religious general interest, to one of the worst forms of despotism. The Unique doesn’t want to be made the object of collective ends, becoming a tool of society, but rather considers society as one of his means. As Benjamin R. Tucker rightly maintained: “Society is not a person nor a thing, but a relation; and a relation can have no rights,” nor – I would add – can it impose duties. But since, for Stirner, established society cannot block the individual from making value of herself, nor can the future societies promised by socialists and communists expropriate him of his property, the separation from the social order must be so complete and decisive as to “bring about the end of separation itself” and be overturned in federation, in union. In fact, “as the Unique, you can assert yourself only in the union, because the union doesn’t possess you, but rather you possess it or make use of it.” Property only gets recognized in it, because I no longer hold what is my own as a fief from any being, but I myself am to be its source and it’s self-guarantee. Private “property,” on the other hand, is only a state concession, a fief that transforms the individual “owner” into a vassal; it is the political form of pauperism and vassalage. Only once the “war of all against all” – which isn’t a form of expanded domination, but the calm acceptance of the conflict of interests – is declared, the union will be able to be born as the “multiplier” of individual powers, as a tool, as a “sword” for increasing one’s capacities and thus, since everyone is unique only together with his property, it will thus reinforce the feeling of uniqueness.

The choice of association must be voluntary, just as the breaking of the associative agreement must be free and voluntary. By associating, the particular individual doesn’t renounce his own individuality, as occurs in society, but on the contrary, affirms it in all its fullness.

When an individual needs to unite with others to achieve a specific objective (a need that is not at all contradictory, or better, paradoxical with regards to one’s being unique), what may appear to be a sacrifice – as a

limitation of his freedom would appear – is only a deployment of his powers. In fact, not being able to meet all of her needs by herself, by associating he only sacrifices what he does not possess, i.e., she “doesn’t sacrifice a goddamn thing.” To put it another way: not having the freedom “to do it by himself,” it’s not possible to maintain that he sacrifices it by uniting (and obviously coming to an agreement) with others. In each instance, if one wants to speak of limitations as such, what is reduced in the union is freedom (but it’s a case of mutual restrictions not determined by authority and the sacred as happens in the state and the church), not one’s individuality. For Stirner, “the ideal of ‘absolute freedom’ expresses the absurdity of every absolute.” Only one who thinks – religiously – of freedom as an absolute could fail to perceive the differences between a form of relationship that guarantees to everyone the expression of their exclusivity (and doesn’t limit their freedom except with those rules that are inherent to the relationship itself) and a communitarian order which – as something sacred – is based on subjection and the lack of individual self-valorization.

Since the union, unlike society, the state or the church has no existence autonomous from the particular individuals who compose it, its duration is determined by the interests of the “participants.” It is therefore a “unceasing coming-back-together” as opposed to the “already-being-together” typical of (and foundational to) every hierarchical relationship. A “taking-part” in a game to which one contributes to establishing the rules, as opposed to a “being-part” of a social order that presents itself as authority and imposes its laws.

The union is not only an alternative to society, but also a tool for rising up, for rebelling against hierarchy, authority, the state (a word which Stirner often uses to indicate the entire existing order). Considered both as a relational form and as a counter-association, the union is closely connected to rebellion.

If “my egoism has an interest in liberating the world so that it becomes – my property,” the demolition of what exists, the overturning of given conditions, while being inevitable consequences of rebellion, don’t exhaust my incentive for insurrection, which is the only way to affirm my centrality in the world, and thus in my relations. Without insurrection I cannot create relations that are not mediated, by God or by the state, “mutual relationships such that everyone..., in these relationships, can be truly what he is.” Equally, without my egoistic will to rise up, the union against authority and hierarchy ceases to be my tool and ends up becoming – “just as from a thought a fixed idea arises” – a higher being, a party. Only a form of relationship that affirms the uniqueness of the particular individual is able to avoid reproducing the order of dependence within itself. The Unique cannot oppose hierarchy through a means – the party – that is only “a state within the state,” “a ready-made society” for which he is supposed to renounce his own individuality.

This battle can also take place with “millions of people together”; what matters is that the multitude is not transformed into the subject, into that “all” which preserves the traits of transcendence and, thus, of mediation. What opposes mutuality to hierarchy is not the number, either positively or negatively. In fact, and I think this is very important, a “collective” dimension (in the sense of I+I+I...) with an individualistic character can be created, just like an individual dimension with a collectivist and alienating character can be created. What distinguishes the defense of individual autonomy from the formation of domination is the associative method. But Stirner, when he speaks of the relationship, of the union of Uniques, refers only to the “form” of such relations: a form that is able to guarantee the centrality of each one. “For Stirner, going beyond the ‘formal’ moment means going back to creating spooks, legitimizing domination, making space for the magic circle,” meaning that moment of alienation that gets created in the dichotomy between being and having-to-be, between existence and essence. Precisely by not creating a new heaven, a new mission, Stirner holds that the contents of the union, the rules of play, will be the exclusive property of the Uniques. If Stirner’s “political” dimension can seem like a utopia, it remains, as the relational world of the Unique, thence of a “who” that cannot be described, an “empty” utopia.

The one-sidedness, the separateness of each Unique still remains (or rather, only becomes complete) in the union. Thus, one cannot make uniqueness correspond with isolation. The individual who associates is no less an egoist than the one who prefers to “stand alone”; what changes is the object of her egoism. If one unites with others, it is because he finds in their company a reason for interest, for enjoyment. If one prefers to isolate himself, it means that human beings no longer have anything to offer her. “Remaining is no less egoistic than isolating oneself.” The distinction is therefore not between egoism and non-egoism, but, if you will, between a “poor” egoism and a “rich” egoism. “One who loves a human being,” Stirner says, “through this same love is richer than another who doesn’t love anyone,” since she has one more “property.” Stirner’s egoism is thus full participation in life, in relationships with others.

Alongside the charge that he wanted to “atomize” individuals, the charge that Stirner, with his union of egoists, limits himself to proposing only a variant in terminology of capitalist society, a mirror image, however extreme, of the bourgeois order, also shows all its inconsistencies. Stirner, after showing the ideological “glue” of capitalist society is humanistic morality (an internal “sanctimonious priest” who preaches sacrifice), maintains that if one had a more aware egoism, one would take into account that “cooperation is more useful than isolation” and that the abandonment of “competition” – that hidden conflict, as mediated by the state – is nothing but a response to a higher feeling of our uniqueness.